

# **The Performance of the Indonesian Press in the Era of Decentralization: Moving Beyond its Imperative Function<sup>1</sup>**

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## **Abstract**

*In this study I took a normative approach to examine the performance of the Indonesian Press in the era of decentralization. My approach included intensive observations on the Indonesia press system and survey among 330 Indonesian journalists and 55 head regencies and 55 regency's secretaries. My analysis of the data and their context revealed the professionalism of Indonesian journalists. In their own opinion, the Indonesian journalists had a high level of professionalism. However, the bureaucrats questioned their self-assurance. Therefore, it was difficult to determine the actual level of professionalism of the Indonesian Journalists throughout the many regions in Indonesia. Fortunately, the Indonesian journalists were free to report news according to the values in which they believed. Based on this condition, the Indonesia press owners no longer had to fulfill the political and commercial imperative functions of the press. The Indonesian press did not limit itself to report political news, but also cultural news to improve of life of Indonesian citizens. In conclusion, I consider that the Indonesian press has moved beyond its imperative function.*

**Keywords:** *the Indonesian press, era of decentralization, professionalism, the Indonesian journalists, and imperative function.*

## **Introduction**

May 21, 1998 ranks as one of the most important dates in Indonesia's history, when university students led public demonstrations that forced Suharto to resign from the Presidency, to be replaced by B. J Habibie. The date is now seen as the first step in Indonesia's reformation on the road to becoming a genuine democracy. Many other steps still needed to be made by government and in law enforcement to regain public trust and establish social and individual liberty. The Indonesian Knowledge Organization (*Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia*, or LIPI) has laid down eight points of

reformation that needed to be implemented by the government regarding the change of the president of the Indonesian Republic (KAGAMA 1988: 4). These eight agendas items included: (i) political reformation; (ii) economic reformation; (iii) human resource and educational reformation; (iv) rule of law and human rights reformation; (v) revitalization of technology; (vi) socio-cultural reformation; (vii) security and defense reformation, and refunctionalization of the armed forces (ABRI); and (viii) reformation of communications system, including the press and broader public media system.

When Suharto took over as President of Indonesia in 1967, he named his new

administration 'The New Order' (*Orde Baru*) to distinguish it from the 'Old Order' regime of Soekarno. The designation 'New Order' was publicized and implemented by every governmental official and by the military, so the term became ubiquitous in all aspects of political, social, and economic life. During the three decades of the New Order era, the press became known as 'the Pancasila press', defined at the 25<sup>th</sup> Press Council Assembly (*Sidang Dewan Pers*), Solo 1984, as a press "whose' attitude and behaviour are oriented to the values of *Pancasila* and the Fundamental Constitution of 1945" as "a healthy, free and responsible press, developing a trustworthy atmosphere towards a democratic and transparent society, with a positive interaction mechanism between the press and the government and with the community" (Rachmadi 1990:197-198). This formulation, however, does not explain to whom the Indonesian press must be responsible and by what means it should be monitored. In practice, the press became totally dominated by government oversight and control, and was required to carry out its duties according to the government's demands and political interests. The Department of Information closely monitored and restrained what could and could not to be reported. In consequence, the Indonesian press was only allowed to carry out its 'imperative function' within the rigid guidelines laid down by the government.

The post-Suharto governments took remarkably swift actions in regard to press *reformasi*. For example, on June 5, 1998, Yunus Yosfiah, then Minister of Information (*Menteri Penerangan*, -MENPEN) called off the SK Menpen No. 1/1984 ('Minister of Information's Letter of Explanation') that had authorized the government to cancel a Newspapers Press Publishing Operation Permit (SIUPP) at any time. Yunus Yosfiah also cancelled SK Menpen No. 47/1975 and SK Menpen No. 184/1978, requiring all journalists to belong to the government-controlled Indonesian Journalists Union

(PWI, *Persatuan Wartawan Indonesia*), the Newspaper Publishers Union (SPS, *Serikat Penerbit Surat kabar*), and the Grafika Press Union (SGP, *Serikat Grafika Pers*). They were now free to establish and join their own professional organizations. Then, on September 23, 1999, President Habibie, endorsed Law No. 40/1999, the first media law to explicitly guarantees the freedom of the press in Indonesia. Section 4 established freedom of the media as a 'basic human right', and Section 5 made it clear that the Indonesian media are allowed to report on events and opinions, including the norms of religion and social ethics, and that they should adhere to the principle that an accused individual must be regarded as "innocent until charged and convicted," thus requiring the Indonesian media to respect human rights and the rule of law.

Habibie's successor as President, Abdurrahman Wahid, continued the reformation of the Indonesian press. In November 1999 he disbanded the Department of Information, issuing never-before-imagined freedom for the Indonesian press. There were no longer to be governmental agencies to control or restrain the liberty of Indonesian press. Wahid also endorsed the principle of a participatory and democratic media, according to which individuals, businesses, local communities or social organizations were allowed to establish and operate their own press media (McQuail 1994: 132). It is possible that Wahid had not heard of democratic-participant media theory, but his disbanding of the Department of Information showed his determination to create a more democratic society by enabling a small-scale, interactive and participatory press to emerge and develop without government oversight or hindrance.

This certainly benefited the nation, and especially the local communities, and both minority and majority groups, given the need to disseminate political, economic, legal, cultural and community information essential to the functioning of an open and participatory

democracy. Although Wahid was only in office for 20 months (October 1999 to July 2001), he was able to validate the philosophy and practice of decentralization on January 1, 2001, under Law No. 22/1999, transferring much of the central government's authority to local regencies and municipalities. In taking over the functions of the central government agencies, these local governments utilized many civil society components, including the press, to disseminate information and influence public opinion. The Indonesian press also finally had the chance to monitor and comment on local politics, and conduct checks and balances on government behaviour and policy-making. A question that arises from these dramatic events is: How has the Indonesian press performed under its new freedom and public responsibility in this era of reform, democracy, and decentralization?

### **The Changing Imperative Functions of the Indonesian Press**

At least two different approaches can be identified in evaluating press reporting, each linked to a different media function or imperative. The first assesses the media's 'normative content', the second its 'business aspect' or profitability. In Indonesia, until recently, the normative aspect included adhering to stringent government guidelines and censorship. However, in the new *reformasi* and *otonomi* era, the Indonesian press no longer functions as an agent of the bureaucracy. Research findings from a 2002 survey, covering 155 local districts in Indonesia, found that press readership also regards newspapers as 'cultural entities', so the Indonesian press performance should also be evaluated as cultural institutions.

Following Suharto's resignation, anyone was free to launch a newspaper or other publication. Although facing an economic crisis, there has been great enthusiasm for publishing new press and other media outlets. Since Suharto's resignation to April 15, 1999, the Department of Information approved 415

SIUPP - Press Publication Permits (Suranto et.al. 1999: 17), and until April 15, 1999, it had approved 852 SIUPP. As the government no longer curbs the operations of the Indonesian press, many publications were launched not only to disseminate information and express opinions, but also to make a profit, as more people now enjoy reading newspapers and magazines, and the media is quick to respond to people's demands. The press owners in particular saw information as a 'product' to be sold according to consumer psychology and sociographic inclinations. As Ashadi Siregar has observed, the press saw the society merely as consumers (1999: 96), and the many press outlets were competing energetically to satisfy and extend their readership. The type of news considered to be of 'high quality', therefore, is that which most pleases and attracts its readers. To create a successful product, the reporters and editorial staff look for news that meets this criterion. It thus must be conceded that the press has increasingly applied the principle of 'press commodification' in conducting its business. This reality is valid because, in addition to being a political organ, a newspaper is an economic enterprise that must make a profit if it is to survive. Substantial capital has been invested in establishing the business, which must cover operating costs and show an adequate return to investors in a limited amount of time. The press must thus also operate under this 'economic imperative'. A popular perception exists that, in the era of decentralization, the money making imperative of press owners has intensified, and that 'standards' have deteriorated due to an increased emphasis and content being devoted to entertainment, sensationalism, sordid events, titillation and various degrees of 'pornography' (as variously defined by different groups of readers). However, a survey of 330 journalists in 155 regencies and cities in 25 provinces, conducted February-April 2001 by the Center for Population and Policy Studies, Gadjah Mada University (CPPS 2002), revealed a very different

interpretation of press performance and purposes. According to respondents, the Indonesian press is significantly fulfilling a socially responsible, normative or moral function. The findings are summarized in the following section. Such surveys of journalists and studies of Indonesian press performance are relatively rare, and this preliminary effort to examine the performance of Indonesian press during the early years of the *reformasi* era is thus both pioneering and thought-provoking.

### Indonesian Press Reporting in the Decentralization Era

The GMU survey of journalists asked the 330 respondents to assign a ‘low, medium, or high’ ranking to their newspaper’s coverage of five main topic areas during 2001: (1) political news, (2) KKN (corruption, collusion, nepotism), (3) community protest against public regulations or proposing new regulations, (4) poverty issues, and (5) social conflicts. The findings are summarized in Table 1 below, where the data show the *percentage of the sample of respondents* who assessed that their papers had assigned low, medium, or high coverage of the respective topics, and distinguishing newspapers published in Java and those published Outside Java.

**Table 1: Survey of Journalist Assessment of their Newspaper’s Coverage of Selected Topics**

| Java Newspapers         |               |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| Outside Java Newspapers |               |
| Low coverage            |               |
| Medium coverage         |               |
| High coverage           |               |
| Low coverage            |               |
| Medium coverage         |               |
|                         | High coverage |
| 1. Political News       | 10.3          |
| 47.1                    | 42.6          |

|                     |      |      |
|---------------------|------|------|
| 8.9                 |      | 42.0 |
| 49.1                |      |      |
| 2. KKN              | 11.6 |      |
| 31.6                | 56.8 |      |
| 21.4                | 24.7 |      |
| 53.9                |      |      |
| 3. Community Reform |      | 5.8  |
| 19.4                |      | 74.8 |
| 18.4                |      | 21.7 |
| 59.9                |      |      |
| 4. Poverty Issues   |      | 16.1 |
| 36.1                | 47.8 | 18.4 |
| 28.6                | 53.0 |      |
| 5. Social Conflicts |      |      |
| 45.4                | 29.6 |      |
| 25.0                | 47.3 |      |
| 34.1                | 18.6 |      |

Source: Data selected from ‘*Survey on Good Governance and Decentralization in Indonesia*’, Center for Population and Policy Studies, Gadjah Mada University, 2002

Notes: (i) ‘Political news’ mainly involves reports on politicians, political parties, elections, etc; (ii) ‘KKN’ is the Indonesian acronym for ‘corruption, collusion and nepotism’; (iii) ‘Community reform’ covers two survey questions that had the same responses: reports of community protests of public regulations and reports of community efforts to propose a new regulation; (iv) ‘Poverty issues’ includes reports on poverty incidence and causes, as well as government and other efforts to alleviate poverty; (v) ‘Social conflicts’ includes reports on intra-community conflicts (e.g. ethnic or religious communities), and also inter-agency conflicts (e.g. between adjacent regencies, or between regencies, provincial or central government agencies).

**1. Political news** (line 1 of Table 1) appears to have somewhat higher relative press coverage Outside Java than in Java, possibly reflecting a relatively higher familiarity (or public contempt) for political skirmishing in Java, or perhaps due to more alternative channels there through which to obtain

political information. There are many other qualitative and impressionistic indications that the people were getting bored with the bombardment of political news being reported in the period between the launch of *reformasi* and the eventual implementation of decentralization.

**2. KKN news** (line 2) shows a higher press interest in covering ‘corruption, collusion and nepotism’ than general political news, and an apparent higher intensity of interest in Java than Outside Java. Such news evidently has a higher prurient or sensationalist public appeal, but it can also be taken as evidence that the press revelations were reminding the public of the extent of the problem and its social costs. It also implicitly conveyed the warning that those guilty of KKN are likely to be exposed and shamed by such press reports. In this regard, the Indonesian press could be said to be performing its moral function, despite the fact that many KKN suspects have been able to avoid being fully investigated and penalized.

**3. News coverage of community protest and proposals for reform** (line 3) has the highest reporting density, with more newspapers in Java having ‘high coverage’ and fewer with ‘low coverage’ than Outside Java. Some of this coverage was actually encouraging local communities, NGOs and other civil society groups, to protest unfair or antiquated public regulations urgently in need of reform or updating, and again shows the press making a positive contribution in alerting the community that they need not just accept public regulations imposed by various levels of government, and encouraging an active civil society participation in public affairs. From personal experience, I believe that Indonesian journalists tend to have an individual ‘special passion’ in reporting news, beyond general news value or directives that come from their superiors. Many were drawn into the profession as advocates of political or social reform and this may explain (or

‘subjectively account for’) the high ranking given this particular topic. Positive press coverage of public demonstrations and grass-roots initiatives to promote reform can thus be seen as encouraging or inciting individuals and community organizations to get more involved in the process of political and social reform. In this way, the press can be regarded as being ‘politicized’ or as making itself a tool to help mitigate the elitist hegemony and frequent aloofness of politicians towards community-level needs and problems. This role can be criticized as being partisan and non-objective, or lauded as appropriate in helping the Indonesian people to create a vision and achieve a consensus on the nation’s *reformasi* agenda, thus helping to realize the hopes and aspirations of community groups and individuals (e.g. in promoting gender equity, religious tolerance, social cohesion and collaboration). However, this conclusion needs to be further confirmed by opinion surveys in the various communities, as the respondents who provided the information in the present survey were all journalists (and could be suspected of being self-serving and self-idealizing). This underscores the need for more surveys of press performance and public attitudes toward it, using more detailed and quantitative assessments of topic coverage and of content analysis (e.g. distinguishing objective reporting and normative commentary).

**4. News on poverty issues** (line 4) shows moderate levels of coverage, with slightly more ‘high coverage’ and more ‘low coverage’ in newspapers Outside Java than in Java, presumably reflecting the greater diversity of ‘rich resource’ and ‘poor resource’ provinces in the Outer Islands, and perhaps the ‘over-exposure’ (and disenchantment) of Javanese citizens with government poverty alleviation policies and projects. This, however, is mere speculation in the absence of more detailed content analysis and public opinion surveys. On the other hand, poverty is such an all-pervasive issue that its concerns

can also be covered as part of news coverage of politics, community protest and civil society activism, and social conflicts, under all of which the Indonesian press can fulfill its moral imperative of helping focus public interest and political concern on the problems of the poor and disadvantaged groups in society.

**5. News on social conflicts,** (line 5) rather surprisingly shows the lowest relative coverage in Java and even somewhat lower Outside Java. The types of conflict being reported were also very diverse, which, among several other dimensions, could be construed to include: intra-community conflicts (among ethnic, religious, male and female special interest and other social groups), conflicts between local communities and local government, political party conflicts, local executive versus legislative council conflicts, inter-regency conflicts, and regency-provincial, central government conflicts. There may thus have been some ambiguity or confusion among respondents in ‘aggregating’ their perceptions of what constituted ‘social conflicts’ for purposes of the survey. Moreover, such reporting might either have incited social tensions and polarization, or it could have helped to be conciliatory in helping the adversaries understand the different views and interest involved and in finding compromise solutions. From a random examination of such reporting, it would appear that reporters in general were not driven by a normative imperative to cover such issues (as they might have been in regard to political, KKN, community-wide protest, and poverty reporting), but were more often responding to the need to explain the sources of social tension or violence that was threatening community and national security and demanded urgent attention. If this interpretation is valid, the Indonesian press could have shown itself capable of objective and socially responsible performance, being willing to involve itself in reporting on

sensitive and controversial issues, helping to inform, educate and secure the best interests of the people. Overall, these preliminary survey findings suggest that Indonesian journalists and their newspapers did not generally have a partisan or normative starting point in deciding priorities in topic coverage, but rather paid attention to what their audiences really needed (or wanted to read). The press seems to have been motivated at least to some degree to report on social change, protest, and malfeasance, making a genuine effort to inform and educate the public. This would seem to indicate that the Indonesian press had thus recreated itself as a ‘cultural institution’ and an instrument of social change and *reformasi*. It should once again be emphasized that these findings are more significant in their pioneering effort, in raising the issues of press performance, motivation, topic coverage, and possible bias, and in blazing the trail for more detailed, quantitative and probing analysis of the role of the press in Indonesia’s newly emerging democratic, decentralized, transparent, and accountable political, social, and economic system.

### **Journalist Professionalism in the Era of Decentralization**

Conceptually, it seems clear that the information reported by the Indonesian press can motivate people and facilitate *reformasi* and initiate change in the community. This is possible because: (i) it transfers new information to its readers, (ii) it has access to more information of a broader variety than do individuals or the local communities, and (iii) it can mirror and project the ‘reality of events’ and developments in the nation and in the local community to the citizens, local community leaders, social activists, politicians and bureaucrats at all levels of government. However, in order to gather such information and properly disseminate it, the Indonesian press must have ‘professional journalists’, with ‘professionalism’ defined by a journalist’s competence in gathering

information, analyzing it, and being able to report it accurately and understandably, and by doing all this while adhering to a 'journalist code of ethics'. If an individual has the required competence and instinctively abides by such a code of ethics, he or she can rightfully be called 'a professional journalist'. Journalism can sometimes be a dangerous profession. In general, however, a professional journalist usually does not experience violence, because attacks on journalists most often occur due to technical difficulties associated with the relationship of the journalist with the subject of his or her reporting, or with an informant. It would seem to be true that the more unprofessional this relationship, the greater the risk of violence a journalist is likely to face. An important question is thus: Have Indonesian journalists become more professional in the era of decentralization? Journalist's responses from the same survey are tabulated in Table 2.

From Table 2, it appears that a larger percentage of journalists are regarded by their peers as 'semi--professional' rather than 'professional', though the size of the two categories are remarkably close.

The percentage of journalists judged to be professional is almost exactly the same in both regions, with Java assessed as having more 'semi-professionals' and Outside Java seen as having a larger share of 'non-professionals' 'Semi-professionals' can include academics and other urban intellectuals, of whom there is probably a higher density in Java, and there are more newspapers and other media there than Outside Java to which they have access. When a bureaucrat intimidates a journalist who is gathering public information, he or she 'violates' the journalist. When a bureaucrat forces a journalist to publish a specific piece of misinformation, that also is a violation of the journalist's integrity. Such violations can also involve bribery, intimidation, or veiled or open threats of imprisonments or even assassination. However, journalists who were violated in this way may also be culpable in being 'unprofessional' in that they lacked the

ethical standards, skills or motivation to resist the threats, or to take available means to counter them in this new age of freedom, accountability and media freedom.

**Table 2: The Perceived Professionalism of Indonesian Journalists**

**According to Journalists**(How would you Rank the Professionalism of Indonesian Journalists?)

| Inside Java       | Outside Java      |
|-------------------|-------------------|
| Professional      | Professional      |
| Semi-Professional | Semi-professional |
| Non-Professional  | Non-Professional  |
| 41.5%             | 41.4%             |
| 48.7%             | 44.7%             |
| 9.8%              | 13.9%             |

**According to Bureaucrats**(Do you regard Journalist's Behaviour as Professional?)

| Inside Java  | Outside Java |
|--------------|--------------|
| "Yes": 25.4% | "Yes": 22.8% |
| "No": 74.6%  | "No": 77.2%  |

Source: Governance and Decentralization Survey: Questionnaire for print journalists, and also for Bupati ('regents') and *Walikota* ('mayors').

Some information on how professional journalists appear to bureaucrats is shown in Table 2, based on responses of 55 heads of regencies and 55 regency secretaries. In this survey, respondents were simply asked to answer yes or no to the question whether, from their experience, they assessed journalists to have behaved professionally. Journalist professionalism was established by two criteria: journalistic skills, and obedience to

‘news limits’ (i.e. observance of the law, journalistic ethics, and an appropriate journalist code of conduct). The findings for Java and Outside Java are very similar, with three-quarters of bureaucrats judging journalists to be behaving unprofessionally, and with slightly more bureaucrats Outside Java concurring with this negative assessment. Comparing the two sections of Table 2, it is evident that there is a glaring difference in perception between the opinions of bureaucrats and how journalists see themselves. How can we account for this? It is possible that bureaucrats are at odds with journalists, seeing them as interlopers or trouble-makers looking for scandal, and taking advantage of press freedom to adversely or unfairly report news events or political developments in their regency or city. Some bureaucrats said that the Indonesian press in general had become a ‘pamphlet press’, with reporters having a negative preconception regarding the conditions or prevailing arrangements in the localities on which they are reporting, and thus selected the facts that supported such biases. Whatever the reasons, it seems to be difficult for bureaucrats to create a congenial and open relationship with journalists. Bureaucrats and journalists have different interests, especially in regard to what facts and activities of prominent individuals should be made the object of public inquiry and widespread publication in the community.

The above findings illustrate that there seems no simple task to define and assess journalist’s professionalism in the new *reformasi* era. It is also not easy to judge how far the ambitions of the Indonesian press to promote or provoke change, and to educate or indoctrinate the people in the era of decentralization is actually being or can be fulfilled. What seems clear, however, is the determination shown by a large section of the Indonesian press to fulfill its role as a cultural, reformist, and socially responsible institution in the era of transition toward a more open and democratic society.

**Developing the Indonesian Press as a Cultural Institution in the Decentralization Era**

What also seems clear is that demands for the Indonesian press to further develop into a socially responsible and cultural institution do not come only from journalists and press owners, but also from the public. If sectors of the public feel that the press and other media are not helping their interests, they can be quick to demonstrate their dismay and anger. There have been many incidents of this in recent years, when, for example, groups of people have attacked press offices, or have obstructed journalists’ access to a community or public meeting, or have prevented them from gathering facts about incidents of social conflict or about activities or members of particular organizations, and in such situations, and in personal vendettas, there have been many instances of journalists being violently confronted.

Journalists are exposed to many types of physical violence and non-physical threats. Table 3 provides some data on the types of physical and non-physical pressures experienced by journalists in the period March 1998 to April 1999, published by the Press and Development Study Organization (LSPP, *Lembaga Studi Pers dan Pembangunan*) and the Independent Journalists Alliance (AJI, *Aliansi Jurnalis Independen*).

**Table 3: Sources and Types of Pressure Against Journalists, March 1998 - April 1999**

| Categories         |                        |         |
|--------------------|------------------------|---------|
| Source of Pressure |                        |         |
| Physical Pressure  |                        |         |
|                    | Non-physical Pressure  |         |
| 1                  | Security personnel     |         |
| 11 (55%)           | (55%)                  | 7 (26%) |
| 2                  | Governmental officials |         |
| (5%)               | (5%)                   | 9 (33%) |
| 3                  | Local community        |         |
| groups             | 5 (25%)                |         |
|                    | 10 (37%)               |         |



|              |         |
|--------------|---------|
| 4            | Unknown |
| 3 (15%)(15%) | 1 (4%)  |

Source: Suranto et.al, 1999; 64.

The data suggest that, taking physical and non-physical pressure together, local community incidents account for the highest percentage of cases where journalists were subject to such interference. In terms of physical (or more violent) pressure, security guards were identified as being most implicated, while local communities accounted for 25% of such incidents. This shows that the public communities are capable of conducting physical violence if the press media are seen to be too inquisitive, as is seen as having misreported or shown a bias against their interests. It surely is not easy for reporters to figure out what are the exact demands and interests of the public, but in this era of turbulent change, uncertainty, and uneasy transition to democratic decentralization, the public obviously needs lots of information regarding what is happening, how to protect and further their legitimate interests (especially in their interaction with government), how to monitor and influence local politicians, and how to define and expand their role in civil society. The Indonesian press must play a key role in helping provide such information, involving clear analyses and informed commentary on all of these concerns, if it genuinely intends to serve as a cultural institution of responsible instrument of social reform.

It is always praiseworthy to declare one's sincere intentions to serve the 'public good' and the nation's 'best interests'. But the Indonesian press experience in the new era of press freedom, *reformasi* and decentralization, shows a need for more professionalism and dedication to make such intentions a permanent and indisputable reality. Results so far are encouraging, and should stimulate the press to improve its performance in meeting the public's needs and expectations, so that it is recognized not only by its readers, and by citizens at large, as well

as community leaders, politicians and bureaucrats, as an honest purveyor of information, valuable cultural institution, a positive force for change, and a respected profession that a new generation of intelligent and energetic young recruits will be proud to join.

### **Public Sphere Encountering the Indonesian Press**

As a fourth estate, the Indonesia Press involvement in a democratization process is inevitable. In order to do that, as notes by Ashadi Siregar, the Indonesian press has to warrant: (i) public facts promulgated by the media press are those worth as public issues; (ii) public issues reported by the press are journalism information; (iii) journalism information becomes the sources in the process of the creation of public opinion (2002:xviii). This explanation has showed that the Indonesian press must work hard to be able to participate in the democratization process.

A further question then occur following this explanation, what kind of participation should be provided by the press in a real political realm, so it could be regarded as involving in a democratization process? Before we could answer this particular question, we need to discuss several approaches in advance about participation in the political world. One of these approaches, as notes by Thomas Meyer and Lew Hinchman, consists of, first, the *democracy as a market place*. This model emphasizes that the choice of political elites as a much stipulation to fulfill the needs of democracy, namely, the creation of political conducts that ensue a policy to defend public interests. Second, the *participatory of democracy*. This model explains that the necessity claim to legitimize a democratic society is: citizens are not only participate in general election, but also in formulating and maintaining their interests in various organizations. Third, *democratic civil society*, known also as *civil society* model. It explains that democracy

cannot too much to hope for from many institutions nor organizations, such as systems and political parties, but rests upon the participation and decision making which should be generated by the civil society (2002:5-7). These three models, actually, comply with the normative claim of western democracy. Everyone agrees that the comprehensive and reliable information about social and political systems should always be available.

For the Indonesian context, the reformation that had overthrown the new order rezime has received a kind of mandate to materialized *civil society* (Siregar, 2002:xix). Suchlike, the participation model that conforms to the press in the development of democracy is *democratic civil society* model. Civil society itself, as indicates by Afan Gaffar, is a type of society, whether individually or group, able to well participate with the government independently (1997:30). In order to interact and well participate, each individual and group needs accurate information about political systems from the media press.

In providing accurate information on political life, *free public sphere* is always imperative. Free here means, that is no power could dominate public sphere, such as the power of government, religion and so on. Public have wide access to various institutions available in the community life, started from a state bureaucracy, parliament, justice and the legal systems, interest groups, political parties, and so on. Reality, however, shows that public sphere after the collapse of the new order had become the object of intense competition among many social groups with mass communalism based. One of the original mass communalisms, according to Ashadi Siregar is a political party (2002:xxii).

The occurrence of the facts is certainly inevitable. In this particular condition, a question then comes forth, how do political parties respond to it? In the civil society, the position of political parties could essentially be a part of the government sovereignty,

namely, political parties who prevail in general election (Gaffar, 1997:29). While the position for the loser, serve as the balance of power of the government.

## Conclusions

The above discussion supports the view that the Indonesian press it itself undergoing a major *reformasi* following its emancipation and reconstruction under the post-Suharto regimes of Habibie, Wahid, and Megawati. In many respects the results are really impressive. Indonesian journalists are now free to report news according to the values in which they believe in and that they see best serve the nation's and the varied community interests. Indonesian press owners no longer must adhere to a political imperative imposed by a corporatist state authority, and indeed they have sought rationally to fulfill their economic or commercial imperative of financial sustainability. But this obsession has not diverted their papers from meeting its cultural and moral obligations in the era of decentralization and democratization.

In implementing its moral function, the Indonesian press has not limited itself to reporting political news, or scandalously reveling in reporting corruption or the self-interest squabbles and infighting of Jakarta-based politicians. Instead, the Indonesian press has played a generally responsible role in disseminating crucial facts and other information and in publicizing proposals for reform, in generating new ideas and components for a new social vision, while also encouraging people to find out and respond what is happening around them in terms of social, political, and economic concerns, to protest injurious public policies and to propose new regulations that help the local community, and to expose, condemn and avoid being involved in KKN. It can thus be said that the Indonesian press is meeting its responsibility to help inform and educate its readers, and to improve the quality of life of Indonesian citizens.

One primary condition that the Indonesian press must address if it is to win and retain the trust and respect of its readers, the social and political decision-makers, and the public at large, and this is to maintain and improve its level of professionalism. We have seen that there is some divergence of perceptions in this regard between journalists and bureaucrats. In their own opinion, journalists have a high level of professionalism, but bureaucrats question the self-assurance. In consequence, it is hard to objectively determine from information available the actual level of professionalism being practiced throughout the many regions of Indonesia. All that we know is that responsible parts and organizations of the Indonesian press are conscientiously and continuously trying to implement its moral function, while local communities are also exerting pressure on the press to extend and better fulfill its moral function.

What can be concluded is that, with increasing professionalism of its journalists, the Indonesian press can surely improve its role as a channel of reliable information, objective analysis, and support for reform and democratization. It can play a critical role in helping the people and local communities to understand the many changes that are taking place, the challenges and opportunities that they present, and how to actively participate in charting their own future on the road to democracy and a better life. The biggest need and challenge is the development of the Indonesian press as an essential element in the democratization process. This puts a huge burden on the Indonesian press and also makes it vulnerable to attack by forces trying to limit or reverse democratization.\*\*\*

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**(Footnotes)**

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